

# Chapter 6

## CONCLUSION

### THE ROAD AHEAD

Long-term efforts to tackle the problems of substance abuse and drug dealing have greatly improved the health and safety of District residents. Although progress has been real and significant, particularly with regard to reductions in drug-related crime and illness, there have been some set backs, including a resurgence in the homicide rate. Moreover, District residents have only begun to benefit from the investment in reducing substance abuse and its consequences. Progress that has occurred to date must be seen for what it is: an initial payoff from an initial investment. The District has completed the first two phases of its substance abuse-related strategic planning process (see Figure 1). More must be done and the Task Force members are committed to seeing that it is.

During the months ahead, the Mayor's Interagency Task Force on Substance Abuse Prevention, Treatment and Control (the Task Force) will continue to push for a larger investment and sustained commitment to address substance abuse and its damaging effects on young people and the entire community. With both leadership and a "venture capital" outlook on substance abuse funding, District residents will ultimately be rewarded with safer streets, healthier children, stronger families, and a better environment within which to live, work, and prosper.

The formulation of this citywide Substance Abuse Strategy (the Strategy) has achieved a number of notable firsts in the District's substance abuse policy history. For the first time, the District has a reliable assessment of the nature and extent of the drug problem affecting its population. For the first time, the city has a set of articulated goals and objectives to achieve progress and lasting results. For the first time, the District has a comprehensive plan of action that includes all dimensions of the local area drug market, from drug use to drug dealing. For the first time, the District has identified performance targets against which to provide feedback about its progress in achieving results. And for the first time, the District has an oversight body to monitor implementation and to ensure accountability for results.

This Strategy could not have been produced without the extensive involvement of the stakeholder community. The Strategy Working Groups, formed by the Task Force and comprising representatives of the prevention, treatment and criminal justice communities, as well as the Neighborhood Forums, identified key issues and specific ideas that they believed could lead to improvements in the substance abuse problem in the District. In many instances, the Working Groups brought together individuals and organizations for the first time to discuss the substance abuse problem in the District. Many treatment providers, for example, had never sat down together with District officials to discuss the problems they faced in providing services to the city's addicted population.

As the Strategy Working Groups continued to meet and expand over time, a range of community assistance organizations as well as representatives from the District's early childhood development community, and the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council provided valuable guidance to the strategic planning process. Moreover, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments offered tremendous perspective on the substance abuse problem affecting the greater metropolitan region and generated useful ideas for further study and ways to improve regional coordination. In the months to come, the Task Force will continue to rely on these Working Groups, as well as neighborhood coalitions, collaboratives, and other grassroots organizations, for input and advice.

This Strategy is a dynamic plan that requires continuous monitoring and oversight. The mayor intends to rely on the Task Force to manage and oversee substance abuse control efforts in the District and to report on the District's progress toward achieving results. Over the next year, it will engage a number of activities to track the government's efforts in reducing demand and drug trafficking. Its efforts and responsibilities will include the following:

- **Annual Report to the District:** The Task Force will prepare an annual report to the District on its progress in achieving results and biennially discuss those results as defined by the performance outcomes.

- **Program Inventory and Budget Review:** The Task Force will prepare annually a consolidated substance abuse program inventory and budget describing government activities and expenditures in the District, including local and federal expenditures. The Task Force will work with the city administrator to help coordinate the mayor's budget priorities for substance abuse.

- **Action Plans:** The Task Force will convene regular meetings of the prevention, treatment, criminal justice, and regional Working Groups, with continuing stakeholder input, to build action plans for each objective by logically outlining what activities and outputs should occur, by whom, and by when. Through this process District agencies and other working group participants will improve coordination of existing activities and identify and collectively address gaps in the system. These plans will be used by the Task Force as a means for holding individual agencies accountable for their responsibilities.

- **Data Analysis:** The Task Force will coordinate the biennial collection of drug-related data to illuminate the nature and extent of drug use and trafficking in the District. It will oversee the collection of local data, such as the DC Household Survey on Substance Abuse, and will coordinate with national organizations, such as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration and the National Drug Intelligence Center, for assistance in data collection. The Task Force will include a discussion of the drug problem in its annual report to the District.

- **Coordination:** The Task Force will ensure that the activities of the Strategy are well coordinated with existing District agency strategic plans through a regular "crosswalk check" of Strategy action items and agency programming.

These activities will strengthen the District's planning, monitoring, and oversight of the Substance Abuse Strategy. They will craft solutions, in a methodical and measurable manner, for critical problems that have faced the District for the last decade. Perhaps most important, they will address the gap between treatment services and the numbers of addicts who could benefit from them and the disturbing lack of treatment options for drug-involved youth and addicted women with children.

Although many government-generated reports are quickly forgotten, the Task Force, according to the mayor's order, will report regularly on the District's progress toward achieving results and continue to consult with the stakeholders to whom it is accountable and who stand to gain the most by the Strategy's advances and outcomes.